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Letters to the Editor

YES: Casa Latina wants to meet the neighbors

Editor,

I have heard from many of our friends and supporters who live in the Rainier Valley neighborhood that the community takes pride in its ethnic diversity and is welcoming of immigrant communities. Your voice ("Walk the talk," *Seattle Star*, Jan. 5-18, 2005) and others like yours confirms that reputation.

That said, I understand that there are some in the community who have some legitimate concerns about CASA Latina moving into the old Chubby and Tubby site. I have appreciated hearing those concerns and we are working with the neighborhood to address all of those concerns.

On the evening of Feb. 15 we will present our organization and our plans in an open community meeting at the Mount Baker Community Club. I hope that this meeting will be well attended by those who welcome us, those who have concerns about us, and those who just want to meet us before making any judgment.

I look forward to getting to know the community before we move in and continuing to be an active member of the community and the Chamber of Commerce after we move in. I know that we can work together with the neighborhood to strengthen the economic, social, and cultural fabric of this vibrant and changing neighborhood.

*Hilary Stern, Executive Director
Casa Latina*

YES: Rainier Avenue has room for everybody and that includes Casa Latina

Editor:

I have seen the *Seattle Star* here and there as a new homeowner on Beacon Hill and perhaps picked it up once. After being forwarded the editorial advocating for CASA Latina—and in my mind for dialogue and a genuine democracy!—I can tell you I will pick up the *Star* now every chance I get. And when the opportunity arises support you and yours through advertising.

I understand the concerns of the Rainier business community (though I am very skeptical as to how the well-organized Mount Baker community will be directly impacted) but they certainly underestimate the equally important social justice concerns of some of their consumers and constituents.

I drive along the part of Rainier Avenue where CASA could be located all the time—shopping and commuting—and frankly, I don't see anywhere near enough places that serve as an engine to serve the community that already resides there. Gentrification will happen in time, we can all be assured of that, given our proximity to downtown and to the exciting changes in Columbia City, but far less guaranteed is how to bring all sectors of a changing South Seattle along to share in the bounty. I especially appreciate your acknowledgement that persons already living near Rainier will directly benefit from CASA's programs, which include but are not limited to the Day Laborer Center. Can Latina women near Rainier welcome leadership and support opportunities just for them (with free daycare to boot?) Will more English as a second language classes that are for the wider community, not only Latinos, benefit an area where many immigrants reside? What about on-site job training that isn't possible in a trailer without a bathroom? Can the Rainier Valley use free or low-cost skill-building so people have options beyond and above the pay for entry-level retail?

I don't see why not. It is only through self-determination and dialogue that we will learn what opportunities that may exist with this new neighbor. The place, as you write, has gone unclaimed for two years. Let's not operate in a scarcity construct—there is enough opportunity for new businesses as well as social investments.

Another [thought] occurred to me when I read this editorial and I thank you for it: How can we sincerely and morally be seen to grieve for devastation abroad when we cannot think our way through how best to co-habitate with our community in need right here at home? I will ponder that a while myself and figure out how I can do better.

*Leticia Lopez
Beacon Hill*

NO: Casa Latina is not what Rainier Avenue needs

Editor:

The Rainier Chamber, along with Mount Baker Community Club, Genesee Merchants, Powerful Schools, John Muir PTA, SouthEast Effective Development (SEED) and Southeast Crime Prevention are opposed to Casa Latina's plan to locate their Day Laborer Program at the site of what was formerly Chubby and Tubby. The Rainier Valley is made up of schools, single-family homes and is currently a more fragile economic area. ... The Chamber and so many other long-time stakeholders in our community understand that a strong economy and family wage jobs for all is not a foregone conclusion. We are all working hard to attract commerce, especially retail on main thoroughfares, to help the Valley develop sustainable employment and business opportunities here in our community.

We do not object to the addition of Casa Latina to the Rainier Valley, merely its proposed location. This chosen location is a delicate section of Rainier Avenue South that has had problems over the years and is one of the stretches of Rainier Avenue most in need of new investment. At its former location, Casa Latina failed to prevent unrelated day laborers from congregating for several blocks around its site. Similar activity at the Chubby and Tubby site would inhibit the economic development that would otherwise come to this neighborhood. It is for this reason the Chamber opposes Casa Latina's plan. Casa Latina only engaged the community after the community got wind of the pending deal and voiced its concerns. We found out about their interest in the Valley second hand. Why didn't the organization or this paper for that matter acknowledge that the community deserves to be informed and involved?

The Chamber believes the Valley would be better served by a new development or continuing to find a retail tenant for the site that truly contributes to the growth of the Valley. When I moved into this community there wasn't a decent grocery store, there was no drug store, and only a handful of struggling restaurants. You had to travel out of the area for most services. There are signs of improvement in this stretch of Rainier Avenue. We can and should be strategic.

The Rainier Chamber's history and tradition gives us the legitimacy to be an advocate for our community. We are comprised of great for-profit and nonprofit organizations representing many cultures and communities doing great work to serve a range of needs in the Valley.

*Darryl Smith, President
Rainier Chamber of Commerce*
